



BAGGAGE RECONCILIATION

Regulations should take into consideration enhancements in technology and a risk-based approach to security

The Issue

The procedure known as "baggage reconciliation" attempts to ensure that the only baggage loaded onto an aircraft is that belonging to passengers of that flight who have actually boarded the aircraft.

Baggage reconciliation was introduced into Annex 17 in the 1980s at a time when advanced automated screening for explosives in hold baggage was not available. The process was implemented as a compensatory security layer as a response to vulnerabilities identified after several tragic attacks on aircraft involving bombs placed in unaccompanied baggage.

The Vision

Regulations should reflect and adapt to changes in security technology and procedures. They should also acknowledge the fact that the introduction of new security measures may have made the existence of older measures irrelevant or less relevant. Regulations should embrace the principle of risk-based security, whereby security standards and recommended practices are adopted to effectively counter the current risks and actively reflect the evolving threat situation.

The Solution

Regulations should take into consideration that the general framework and assumptions for the transportation of unaccompanied hold baggage have considerably changed since the implementation of baggage reconciliation in the 1980s. This can be justified by the following arguments, detailed below: 1. 100% Hold Baggage Screening (HBS) is now a standard in Annex 17, and; 2. Screening technology, particularly the ability to detect explosives, has considerably improved.

1. ICAO Annex 17's 4.5.1 obliges the Contracting States to screen hold baggage prior to their loading onto an aircraft. This 100% HBS requirement was adopted in 2006, nearly twenty years after the decision to mandate baggage reconciliation measures. No re-evaluation of the risk taking into account this fundamental new standard has yet taken place.
2. Screening technologies have considerably advanced since the implementation of baggage reconciliation. Modern in-line, multilevel hold baggage screening systems which utilize technically mature Explosive Detection System (EDS) equipment are deployed in many of the world's airports.

The Security Manual of ICAO, although only comprising recommendations, can be seen as useful guidance for interpreting Annex 17's SARPs. Appendix 27 to the Security Manual, "Hold Baggage Reconciliation and Authorization", mentions in its paragraph 16 that "Each item of unaccompanied hold baggage must be subjected to at least one of the following enhanced security controls" and goes on to list five possible methods of enhanced screening, including EDS. One can consider that where screening was initially done at one of these "enhanced" screening methods, offloading a bag and screening it a second time with the same equipment provides no real added value. Therefore, additional screening should be limited to cases where the initial screening was not performed at an enhanced level such as EDS.

The Benefits

The impact of removing the need to subject every unaccompanied bag to a second screening would be significant:

- By setting out options to either use enhanced screening standards from the outset, or offload and re-screen unaccompanied baggage, a clear incentive would be provided for further investments in explosive screening technology at airports, which would in turn benefit the overall security framework. Considering the current operational constraints, investments in technology would potentially be offset by the operational benefits made by no longer having to re-screen baggage.
- This would be in line with recent developments in several regions of the world. We are aware that in some countries, domestic flights are already exempted from performing baggage reconciliation, and many already do exempt this function in cases where the bag has been separated from the passenger for reasons outside of their control.

In addition, in a clarification effort, several Contracting States have taken the approach in their national legislation that hold baggage reconciliation is not necessary when the bag has been separated from the passenger for reasons outside of their control. This makes sense from a risk point of view.